



Employer Satisfaction Project
2000-2005 Performance Funding Cycle
2002-2003

October 7, 2003

INTRODUCTION

In an effort to better understand the nexus between higher education institutions and the Tennessee work force, the Employer Satisfaction Project was added to the Performance Funding requirements. The intent of this project is for institutions to conduct surveys and focus groups with the employers of their recent graduates. The findings of these studies are then to be used by the institutions to better prepare students for the college to work transition.

Survey components are not new to Performance Funding requirements. The Enrolled Student Survey has been a bi-annual item for Performance Funding for more than a decade and the Alumni Survey has been conducted by many institutions twice in the last three years. Similar to these surveys, the goal of the Employer Satisfaction Project is to provide institutions with relevant information that may assist in future planning. While the Enrolled Student Survey and Alumni Survey encourage institutions to exceed mean scores of statewide peers and their own previous surveys, the Employer Survey is treated as 22 unique employer satisfaction studies.

In the fall of 2002, institutions submitted proposals for their Employer Satisfaction Project. The Tennessee Higher Education Commission gave few requirements to shape these projects and instead gave institutions the autonomy to undertake this project in a manner that would provide their institution the most useful feedback. Most institutions created surveys to be distributed to major employers of their recent graduates. Some focused on local employers in their immediate community, while others surveyed a broader geographical area. In a few cases, institutions concentrated on the employers of one particular academic program. For example, Tennessee State University distributed surveys to the employers of their recent graduates in the College of Education who became teachers. While no two institutions approached the Employer Satisfaction Project exactly the same way, common themes do arise in both their methods and their findings.

TRENDS AND THEMES

Just as each institution has a different mission and character, each institution chose to focus their Employer Satisfaction Project in different manners. However, most institutions relied on similar methods and yielded similar results. Of the 22 institutional submissions, only the University of Memphis did not distribute some form of survey, instead opting to conduct a series of focus group meetings with employers. Most of the institutions utilizing survey methods distributed them by multiple means (mail, email, web-based); two institutions chose to conduct surveys via telephone interviews. These slight variations in methods do not appear to have elicited significantly different findings. In fact, the following common trends and themes emerge.

1. *Results were overwhelmingly positive.* Considering all the survey items from all 21 institutional surveys, none had negative mean scores. The variation in survey responses, therefore, is almost entirely in the range of satisfied to very satisfied. The result of these positive responses, as seen in the next section of institutional summaries, is that areas for improvement were likely items that employers rated graduates as average or slightly above average.

2. *Employers appear to be less satisfied with communication skills (written and verbal) than with other skills and characteristics of graduates.* This trend is especially evident in the community college surveys, but also applicable to four-year institutions. Exceptions include Austin Peay State University, East Tennessee State University, and University of Tennessee, Knoxville which all had respondents rate “interpersonal skills” among the highest items.
3. *Leadership skills and adapting to change appear to be areas of improvement for recent graduates entering the work force.* This trend is more apparent in the universities and is not included in many of the community college surveys. While most recent graduates being in entry-level positions may explain these lower scores, the trend may also suggest that employers expect more leadership characteristics from university graduates.
4. *The implementation plans primarily involve distributing findings to the appropriate administrative and academic departments and allowing them to implement changes.* This strategy appears to be a realistic approach due to the targeted scope or low number of respondents of most surveys. A few institutions appear to have taken more centralized and aggressive implementation plans that may over estimate the reliability of findings garnered from a limited number of respondents.

These trends and themes emerge from institutional projects that collected similar data, asked similar questions, and recommended similar implementation plans. Recognizing that these trends and themes, however, may over generalize findings and not account for the variation in Employer Satisfaction Projects, the next section summarizes the projects of each institution. Much of the text comes directly from the institutional reports in an attempt to glean the most pertinent information from the project.

INSTITUTIONAL SUMMARIES

Austin Peay State University

Analytic Methods – Three surveys were conducted to “triangulate the transition from degree completion to the workforce.” (1) Telephone survey of 134 randomly selected APSU seniors to assess their employment expectations. (2) Telephone survey of 113 randomly selected recent APSU graduates to assess their employment satisfaction. (3) Mail survey sent to 200 employers to assess employment satisfaction. The response rate was 24% and 41 surveys were analyzed.

Findings – In each of the three surveys, significant trends emerged. (1) Seniors reported a desire to live in Clarksville, expect higher wages than are currently paid, and express satisfaction with their educational experience at APSU. (2) Recent graduates reported moderate levels of dissatisfaction with job opportunities in Clarksville, yet express confidence in their professional skills. (3) Employers reported high levels of satisfaction with graduates’ communication skills and moderate levels of satisfaction with their technical skills.

Implementation Plan – As a result of the workforce survey project, Austin Peay State University identified three recommendations. (1) The need to better prepare graduates for the realities of the

workforce, perhaps through a series of senior seminars. (2) The workforce need for more Associate's degree graduates. (3) The need to align APSU academic programs with community needs.

East Tennessee State University

Analytic Methods – A team of ETSU faculty members developed the Employer Satisfaction Survey, which was distributed to primary employers of ETSU graduates: six area chambers of commerce, school principals in the surrounding 17 county region, recruiters registered with career placement office, recruiters who participated in career fairs, and human resource directors of recent ETSU graduates who informed the ETSU alumni office of their employment. The survey was mailed to 4270 potential respondents, which yielded 254 usable surveys for a response rate of 6%.

Findings – With regard to the knowledge and skills of ETSU graduates, the highest ratings included “interpersonal relationships with co-workers,” “interpersonal relationships with customers/clients,” and “use of current technology.” The lowest ratings included “skill in initiating change,” “leadership skills,” and “skill in adapting to change.” However, even the lowest rated question had a mean score of 3.71 on a scale of 1-5 (5=high satisfaction, 1=low satisfaction). With regard to characteristics of ETSU graduates, “dependability” and “commitment” ranked the highest, while “leadership behaviors” and “need for orientation” ranked the lowest. Again, even the lowest characteristic represented moderate satisfaction with a mean score of 3.56 for “leadership behaviors.”

Implementation Plan – Survey results will be distributed campus-wide during the fall 2003 semester and departments will be asked to suggest improvement actions, such as additional course offerings or student experiences to identify ways students could better adapt to change and demonstrate leadership.

Middle Tennessee State University

Analytic Methods – Using the Total Design Method and items provided by Dr. Trudy Banta, MTSU developed a survey to be distributed to employers solicited from the MTSU Office of Cooperative Education, MTSU Career and Employment Center, and deans and department chairs. The response rate was 28.5% and yielded 113 surveys.

Findings – With regard to performance of MTSU graduates, the job traits with the highest ratings include “being dependable and on-time” and “working cooperatively.” The lowest ratings include “leading others” and “making decisions under pressure.” Additionally, nearly 77% of employer respondents indicated that they would “definitely” hire this employee again for the same position. Fewer than 6% indicated that they would “probably not” or “definitely not” hire the employee again.

Implementation Plan – Narrative responses from employers and a list of all responding companies were distributed campus-wide. Also, items in which MTSU graduates were perceived as “fair” or “poor” can be addressed in course planning.

Tennessee State University

Analytic Methods – The College of Education at TSU conducted a post-graduation assessment which surveys graduates and their employers in both the first year after graduation and the third year after graduation. In the spring of 2003, these surveys yielded 41 responses.

Findings – In response to a question regarding how well TSU teachers compare to teachers from other programs, 75% of respondents indicated that TSU teachers are “as well prepared as most others.” An equal number of respondents indicated that TSU teachers are “more prepared” and “less prepared.”

Implementation Plan – Results from these surveys will enhance the College of Education’s efforts to further improve the teacher education program and processes.

Tennessee Technological University

Analytic Methods – An interdisciplinary committee of TTU faculty and administrators designed an employer survey relying on focus groups with employers to generate the knowledge and skills to be evaluated. Surveys were distributed to 415 employers of recent TTU graduates. The response rate was 24%, yielding 101 responses.

Findings – Considering the relative importance of various skills for employers, problem solving, communication, and teamwork rated the highest, while technical skills and working with diversity rated lower levels of importance. Of eight knowledge/skill areas, seven had mean scores above 5 (agree) on a 6 point Likert scale. The only skill not to exceed 5 was “communication.”

Implementation Plan – Based on these survey results TTU has taken both specific tangible steps and long term planning steps to improve TTU graduates’ preparation for the workforce. For example, TTU modified the general education curriculum to include a speech/professional communications course. Furthermore, TTU has developed efforts to assess and improve critical thinking skills and adopted a strategic goal to provide every undergraduate the opportunity to participate in original research activities, service-learning activities, and projects that require teamwork.

University of Memphis

Analytic Methods – Two University of Memphis departments (Bureau of Business and Economic Research/Center for Manpower Studies and the Office of Academic Programs and Assessments) collaborated to conduct five focus group meetings with 42 individuals selected with assistance from college deans, department chairs, program directors, and others at University of Memphis.

Findings – Based on the five focus group interviews the following basic points emerged

- Internship experience was important.

- Employers valued communication skills, ability to work in a team, academic proficiency, ability to think on their feet, and strong work ethic.
- Participants took issue with the broad-based general education requirements, preferring that students have more courses in their major or in professional development courses.
- Many participants felt that programs such as nursing, clinical nutrition, biology, and engineering, which require organization, classification, and structure developed the strongest job candidates and employees.
- University of Memphis should improve the network and communication link with the regional business community.

Implementation Plan – Results from the focus group study are to be presented to the Executive Council and Deans Council during the fall 2003 semester. Additional presentations will be given to the Joint Task Force on Undergraduate Curriculum, department chairs, and SACS reaffirmation sub-committees. Following these discussions, a summary report will be prepared and action plans developed.

University of Tennessee, Chattanooga

Analytic Methods – The Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Institutional Research administered an 18-item survey, which was distributed to 69 major employers of UTC graduates as identified by the Office of Placement and Student Employment, College of Education and Applied Professional Studies, School of Nursing, and the Communications Department. The response rate was 55% with 38 surveys completed and returned.

Findings – With regard to items concerning the recruiting and hiring process relative to UTC graduates, the highest level of satisfaction was with the “quality of candidates hired,” while the lowest level of satisfaction was with the “ability to hire minority candidates.” The most common theme identified in response to the question, “what is the number one reason for hiring UTC graduates?” was the commitment of UTC to the local community.

Implementation Plan – Results from this survey have been widely distributed to campus departments. To follow-up on employer survey results, focus groups will be conducted in selected professional academic programs to provide a more in-depth study of employer satisfaction with the skills and competencies of UTC graduates and to assess communication between university and employers regarding training needs.

University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Analytic Methods – The University of Tennessee Employer Survey was conducted on-line and was successfully distributed to 743 employers identified by Career Services. The response rate was 47%, which yielded 352 responses. The identified contact persons at these organizations received emails with links to the on-line survey instrument.

Findings – With regard to questions concerning the interviewing and hiring process, employers were most satisfied with the accessibility of the Career Services staff and least satisfied with their ability to recruit minority candidates. With regard to how well prepared UTK graduates

were by various skill areas, teamwork and communication skills were rated the highest and the lowest was knowledge of international affairs and their importance in the workplace (this also received the most “not applicable” responses).

Implementation Plan – While the results from the Employer Survey indicated high levels of satisfaction, the current Scorecard initiative addresses two of the relative weaknesses illustrated by the survey—importance of international affairs and ability to hire minority candidates. The Scorecard initiative addresses these concerns with goals of raising the number of both international and African American students by 2010.

University of Tennessee, Martin

Analytic Method – Using an on-line survey developed by Dragon Web Surveys, the Office of Institutional Research and Planning successfully distributed surveys via email to 76 employers identified by the Office of Employment Information Services. The response rate was 34.2% yielding 26 completed surveys.

Findings – With regard to questions concerning the importance of various characteristics, more than 95% of employers identified “a student’s attitude/presentation/personal attributes” as being “very important” (the highest rating), while only 21% identified “a student’s grades” at the same level. The skill areas with the highest ratings were “leadership skills,” “teamwork abilities,” and “problem-solving skills.” “Understanding of the job and/or organization” received the lowest ratings by employers.

Implementation Plan – Five challenges emerged from the survey. The following recommendations are designed to address these challenges.

1. Work with UTM’s five colleges to encourage minority candidates to participate in job recruiting activities.
2. Work with the dean of the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences to develop strategies for encouraging student teachers to participate in teacher career fairs.
3. Develop strategies for improving applicants’ knowledge of the job or organization before interviewing with recruiters.
4. Provide recruiters with an Employer Survey for completion before they leave campus in order to increase the response rate.
5. Continually revise the Employer Survey to improve feedback regarding the employment process of students graduating from UTM.

Chattanooga State Technical Community College

Analytic Methods – Chattanooga State partnered with the Chattanooga Area Chamber of Commerce to survey more than 1200 local employers. This Business and Industry Survey generated 320 respondents.

Findings – Based on results from this detailed survey several themes emerge:

- Overall quality of the workforce is rated good or very good
- The relationship between business and government is rated good

- The ability to retain employees is rated good or very good
- The three most cited reasons for employees leaving a job are better job opportunities, poor work ethic, and moved from area.

Implementation Plan – The Vice President for Business and Community Development is currently using these survey results in the design of business and industry courses. Additionally, a task force has been designated to review these results and make recommendations.

Cleveland State Community College

Analytic Methods – Using a survey instrument designed by career-technical faculty, Cleveland State canvassed 25 large employers of CISCC co-op students and graduates in the service area. Additionally, surveys to more targeted audiences were conducted for the following skill-oriented programs: nursing, human services specialist, early childhood education, and paralegal/legal assistant.

Findings – The most frequently cited reasons for satisfaction with CISCC students were preparation, dependability, technical skills, and motivation to work. Although the responses were overwhelmingly positive, four areas for improvement were indicated: appreciating cultural diversity, communication skills, workplace mathematics skills, and computer skills.

Implementation Plan – Faculty in career-technical programs will be asked to find ways to encourage students to become more aware of employer expectations. These faculty will also be encouraged to re-examine course presentations to include activities that promote general education competencies.

Columbia State Community College

Analytic Methods – The employer survey was mailed to 61 businesses and institutions in the region that have hired past and recent Columbia State graduates. With 21 surveys completed and returned, the response rate was 34.4%.

Findings – Overall employers are satisfied with Columbia State graduates as 94.6% of the respondents indicate that graduates perform at expected or better than expected levels in all skill areas. Employers also indicated that Columbia State graduates are as prepared or better prepared than other employees.

Implementation Plan – In order to obtain more program-specific evaluations in the future, Columbia State plans to involve the program directors in the development of employer surveys tailored to their programs. These surveys will then be administered as part of the regularly scheduled Five Year Program Review. One specific suggestion regarding the need for more clinical experiences in the nursing program confirmed prior feedback and has prompted the faculty to redesign the curriculum in order to include additional clinical rotations and a preceptorship.

Dyersburg State Community College

Analytic Methods – The Employer Survey was distributed to 107 potential respondents including career program advisory committee members and other large employers in the area. With 40 completed surveys returned, the response rate was 37.4%.

Findings – Worker relations and work ethic were the highest rated items regarding how well DSCC prepared students for employment. Math skills and writing skills were the lowest rated items in this section. Nearly 83% of respondents indicated that they were “highly likely” to hire someone who received their education from DSCC; no respondents indicated that they were “not likely” or “highly unlikely.”

Implementation Plan – One recommendation emerged from the review of survey results by faculty: students should be encouraged to take advantage of the internship opportunities available.

Jackson State Community College

Analytic Methods – Employing Total Design Method survey protocol, the Allied Health Program Directors and the Institutional Effectiveness Director developed a 17-item questionnaire which was distributed to 121 employers of 2002 Professional and Technical Studies graduates. The response rate was 60.3% with 73 completed surveys returned.

Findings – Results from the survey were overwhelmingly positive with all respondents selected either “strongly agree” or “agree” to positive statements regarding a graduate’s knowledge or skill. Respondents also identified JSCC graduates as meeting their needs as employees at a rate of 97%.

Implementation Plan—All department chairs and program directors will review the survey finding and make any necessary program modifications they deem necessary. Department chairs or program directors from programs that receive one or more negative responses will be responsible for submitting a Plan of Improvement to be implemented during the 2003-04 academic year. Also, any employers making negative comments or suggestions for program improvements will be contacted directly for further dialogue.

Motlow State Community College

Analytic Methods – With a survey return rate of 42%, Motlow State distributed an employer survey with 19 items, including 15 items asking employer to check agree or disagree with statements regarding graduates performance and preparation.

Findings – The lowest percentage of respondents who disagreed with statement regarding graduates performance or preparation was 7%; therefore, variation is difficult to discern. The results are overwhelmingly positive and all respondents indicated that they would hire more MSCC graduates.

Implementation Plan – Based on the one item of significant disagreement, MSCC graduates employed in a position directly related to their major, Motlow State will implement the following:

- Hold at least one career fair each semester
- Director of Career Planning and Placement will hold career workshops, generate newsletters, and send email with job openings throughout the academic year

Nashville State Technical Community College

Analytic Methods – The Career Employment Center distributed Employer Surveys to the 90 employers of all spring 2003 co-op students and all May 2002 graduates. The response rate was 46% with 41 completed surveys returned.

Findings – The knowledge and skill areas with the highest percent of “excellent” responses were work ethic and current performance level. The areas with the lowest percent of “excellent” responses were written communication skills and problem-solving skills. The surveys from employers of students/graduates of the computer program indicate fewer responses of “excellent” particularly in the written and verbal communication skills.

Implementation Plan – Nashville State will implement an annual survey of employers to generate the opportunity to build trend data and a larger base of responses. One specific area of attention will be actions to strengthen the curriculum in terms of written and verbal communication skills.

Northeast State Technical Community College

Analytic Methods – The Employer Survey was organized, verified, and analyzed by a Northeast State subcommittee. Thirteen respondents returned completed surveys.

Findings – While an overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that they “agree” or “strongly agree” with the 15 positive statements regarding graduates performance, the items dealing with written and verbal communication skills received the lowest ratings.

Implementation Plan – Survey results were widely distributed to campus departments and will be reviewed for institutional program improvement. Member of the subcommittee will follow-up with major employers to clarify the results from their surveys.

Pellissippi State Technical Community College

Analytic Methods – Telephone interviews were conducted with regional employers.

Findings – A large majority (84-95%) of participants indicated average to excellent ratings. However, 7 of the 29 open-ended comments related to the need for improved communication skills.

Implementation Plan – Results from the survey were distributed directly to the Academic and Student Services Vice President and department heads and are available on the website. Specific general education goals are addressed by each department and action plans have been designed to continue enhancing the quality of each program.

Roane State Community College

Analytic Methods – Based on employer contact information provided by recent Roane State graduates, surveys were mailed to 245 employers across RSCC's eight-county service area. A total of 135 surveys were returned yielding a response rate of 55%.

Findings – Employers ranked work ethic, honesty/integrity, and practical skills necessary for employment as the most important skills/values. Respondents' satisfaction with Roane State graduates on these items ranked all three in the top four skills. The most evident gap between employer importance and satisfaction with RSCC graduates was with time management skills, which employers ranked as 4th in importance and ranked satisfaction with RSCC graduates as 12th. Additional areas of improvement include oral and written communication skills and problem-solving and critical thinking skills.

Implementation Plan – Survey results are to be widely distributed across campus. Specific improvement areas include time management skills and oral and written communication skills. Faculty will be encouraged to adopt more oral presentation assignments in all academic disciplines.

Southwest Tennessee Community College

Analytic Methods – The Career Services department developed an employer survey to assess their experience with recent Southwest graduates. A total of 100 employers from various fields responded to the survey via mail, email, or web-based instrument.

Findings – Respondents indicated at a rate of 85% that they would seek Southwest graduates for future job openings. The three most cited skills that respondents seek in employees are communication/interpersonal skills, various technical skills, and engineering technology-related skills.

Implementation Plan—Employer survey findings will be distributed to faculty and staff, particularly the Advising/Counseling, Recruiting, and Marketing departments. Students will be informed of the skill sets employers identified as desirable. Also, the Career Services department will update their website and conduct presentations and workshops throughout the academic year using the data collected in this survey.

Volunteer State Community College

Analytic Methods—The Dean of Business, Dean of Allied Health, and Director of Career Placement refined existing survey instruments to create the Employer Survey which was distributed to employers during the 2002-2003 academic year to graduates of the Allied Health

and Business Divisions. Of the 202 surveys mailed to employers, 107 were completed and returned for a response rate of 48.6% (23-Business, 84-Allied Health).

Findings – Across all programs in the two divisions results from the graduate performance characteristics were above average or excellent with three common exceptions: (1) communicates effectively in writing, (2) communicates effective orally, and (3) demonstrates solid interpersonal skills.

Implementation Plan – To follow-up on Employer Survey results, human resource personnel and managers of local businesses will be invited to participate in focus group discussions. Also, the curriculum of the AAS Fire Science and AAS in General Business Administration will be reviewed to determine if further integration of communication and interpersonal skills could be implemented.

Walters State Community College

Analytic Methods – To follow-up on the Employer Survey conducted in 2000, Walters State distributed another Employer Survey in 2003 to 454 employers of the 2002 WSCC graduates. Yielding a 67% response rate, 304 respondents returned surveys.

Findings – When asked to rate WSCC graduates' technical training compared to other employees, respondents overwhelmingly identified WSCC graduates as better prepared (72%) or as well prepared (25%). Furthermore, 82% respondents rate WSCC graduates as excellent or good with less than 6% rating graduates as needs improvement or poor.

Implementation Plan – Survey results are to be distributed to faculty and advisory groups to share recommendations and develop corrective action reports as necessary.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the common themes and trends and, more importantly, on the variation that exists between institutions, the following recommendations may add to the Employer Satisfaction Project in future years.

1. *Employer Satisfaction Projects should focus on one area of study or program, rather than a wide range of programs.* The institutions using this targeted approach usually received more specific feedback that could be more directly applied to actions plans addressing curricular issues. Especially given the limited number of respondents for many projects, focusing on one program may increase the response rate by directly targeting the employers of recent graduates. Roane State was the only institution to seek employer information directly from their graduates, which yielded a response rate of 55%.
2. *Make implementation plans realistic.* For the most part, institutions outlined implementation plans appropriate to the scope of their surveys. All institutions should strive to implement similar strategies. To implement broad curricular changes or alter

student activity schedules based on a survey of fewer than 50 employers may lead the institution unnecessarily in the wrong direction. Instead, the approaches of widely distributing information and allowing department level administrators to decide on how to use this information appear to be better alternatives.

3. *Pay attention to analytic methods.* As noted by most institutions, response rates were fairly low making any generalizations about the data difficult. An alternative method for institutions who expect fewer than 50 survey respondents, one used by University of Memphis, would be to conduct interviews or focus group sessions with those employers. While these sessions undoubtedly require more time, the focus groups allow for a deeper exploration of employer satisfaction than do surveys.
4. *For institutions interested in using surveys, perhaps THEC could provide a common Employer Survey (similar to the Alumni Survey or Enrolled Student Survey), which could capture statewide trends and provide a template survey for all institutions.* The intent of this recommendation is not to mandate one type of survey, rather to provide institutions with a comprehensive template. While some institutions used this opportunity to assemble committees with faculty and administrators to design unique surveys tailored to their institutions, others distributed surveys that appeared limited in their ability to capture useful information due to the a small number of questions or vaguely worded items. One example of the potential benefit of a common survey is the wording of the questions concerned with communication skills. Most universities used the phrase “interpersonal skills,” while most community colleges disaggregated this item into two more specific questions—“written communication skills” and “oral communication skills.” This slight difference could account for some of the variance in respondents’ satisfaction. It seems that separating this skill into two questions gives institutions more complete information.
5. *Institutions should be provided a reporting template to inform institutions of what information to report.* Overall, institutions reported a sufficient amount of raw data from their surveys; however, some institutions submitted very little information about the methods (i.e., response rate, distribution strategy, survey design), relevant findings (i.e., significant trends or items the institution sees as important), and implementation plans (i.e., how findings will be distributed, how will the information be used). A common reporting template would guide institutions to analyze these results and indicate the scope of information in which THEC is interested.
6. *The Employer Satisfaction Survey should continue.* Despite these few recommendations for improvement in future years, the 2002-2003 Employer Satisfaction Survey provided both institutions and the state with a view of the landscape of employer satisfaction and allowed institutions to use this new perspective to improve academic programs and student experiences. Again, the suggestions for common surveys and reporting template are not designed to institute statewide or longitudinal means testing, rather to maximize the amount of pertinent information each institution receives and ensure appropriate analysis by the institution and THEC.

CONCLUSION

In the first year of this project, the Employer Satisfaction Project has clearly been a success, not only for each institution, but for the entire higher education community. Every institution received full credit for the Employer Survey portion of Performance Funding, hopefully the beginning of a long trend. Recommendations aside, the survey, interview, and focus group data collectively assembled by all 22 institutions report overwhelmingly high employer satisfaction with Tennessee public college and university graduates. As these data suggest strategies to better link our institutions and graduates to the workforce, Tennessee moves closer to the ultimate goals of better educated populace and a better prepared workforce both of which are necessary to compete in the emerging knowledge economy.